

Editorial

The Ego as the Adaptive Core of the Self

Since its psychoanalytic origins, the ego has represented the mind's integrative and regulatory center tasked with mediating between impulse, affect, and external reality. While early theorists such as Freud (1923/1962) viewed the ego as a rational arbiter of drives, later formulations such as those of Hartmann (1958) and Rapaport (1951), shifted the focus toward ego strength and ego functions: capacities for adaptation, resilience, and reality testing. The present volume of *Individual Differences Research* revisits this enduring construct through four distinct yet complementary investigations, tracing how ego functioning manifests in approach to psychological tests, identity formation, resilience, and even the symbolic world of dreams.

Ego Strength and Approach to Tests

The archival article by Thurber et al. (2004/2020) provides a valuable bridge between psychoanalytic theory and psychometric practice. Using the Barron Revised Ego-Strength Scale (Es; Barron, 1953) in relation to MMPI-2 validity indicators, Thurber and colleagues examined how ego strength is related to test-taking style; specifically, self-presentation on psychological tests. Their findings indicated that low Es scores corresponded with “faking bad” tendencies and high Es scores with social desirability. These results could reveal ego strength as not merely a measure of adjustment, but also an influence on response disposition (or alternately, a manifestation of presentation style and self-bias). In the former view, the ego may not simply regulate internal conflict but also manage the presentation of self under evaluative pressure, reinforcing Barron's original proposition that ego strength indexes personality integration and mainlining control under stress.

Identity Status and Substance Use

The second archival article, Mori et al. (2007/2020), extends the ego framework into the developmental domain of ego identity. Drawing on Erikson's (1950) psychosocial model and Marcia's (1966) operational statuses, the authors examined identity formation and substance use among college students. Their results, particularly those indicating higher alcohol and cigarette use among those in moratorium status, underscore the ego's role in negotiating exploration and commitment. At various points, therefore, ego identity emerges as both a developmental achievement and a vulnerability point. Individuals in active identity exploration may engage in risk behaviors as part of experimentation, whereas foreclosed individuals maintain behavioral

restraint through rigid commitment. The findings also coincide with multicultural perspectives emphasizing contextual and cultural moderators of ego development (Côté & Schwartz, 2002).

Renewing the Measurement of Ego Strength

The new empirical study by Daughtry et al. (2020) represents examination of the Ego Strength-18 (Es18), a briefer derivative of Barron's original 68-item instrument. Through convergent and incremental validation, the Es18 demonstrated robust associations with lower psychological distress and greater self-cohesion, while showing discriminant validity from social desirability. These results reaffirm ego strength as a measurable core of adaptive self-functioning and align it with contemporary constructs such as ego resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996), self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996), and secure attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Support for the validity of the Es18 can give researchers seeking a relatively brief measure of ego strength some confidence in its use. This report also renews the empirical accessibility of a concept sometimes regarded as untestable through "objective" self-report.

The Sleeping Ego: Regulation and Containment

Completing the volume, Kelly (2020) reintroduces the ego to the nocturnal mind. Drawing from ego psychology, this study investigates how specific ego functions predict nightmare frequency, integrating psychoanalytic insights with modern affect regulation research. Findings indicated that both weak defenses and excessive control predicted more frequent distressing nightmares, suggesting that the ego's failure in regard to nightmare production lies not only in fragility but also in attempts to overregulate. This bidirectional vulnerability echoes the balance between containment and expression that defines healthy self-organization. This contribution further extends ego psychology into the domain of sleep and dreaming, illustrating how the same regulatory systems governing waking life continue to operate, and sometimes falter, in the dream state.

Integrating Themes: Ego as Regulator and Mediator

Across these four studies, at least two observations/themes emerge: 1) the ego and its structure are measurable through self-report, 2) the ego is a dynamic regulator of internal and external demands, whose strength, structure, and flexibility underpin individual differences in adaptation. Whether through the management of self-presentation (Thurber et al. 2004/2020), the negotiation of identity commitments with behavioral outcomes (Mori et al., 2007/2020), the maintenance of self-cohesion and functioning under distress (Daughtry et al., 2020), or the containment of affective overflow during dreaming (Kelly, 2020), the ego functions as the fulcrum of self-regulation and adaptation.

Contemporary psychology increasingly recognizes these dynamics under new labels: executive control, emotion regulation, self-regulation, and psychological flexibility (Bornstein, 2008). Yet, the underlying processes remain those described by ego psychologists decades earlier. Integrating classical and modern frameworks may thus yield a more comprehensive understanding of adaptive functioning across conscious and unconscious domains (Block, 2002; Kernberg, 2016).

Volume 18, the sixth volume of the *IDR* Back Volumes Project, illustrates that ego theory remains not a relic but evolving concepts that can link psychoanalytic depth and insight with contemporary empirical assessment and constructs of resilience and self-integration. Each contribution of this volume, in its own way, is a reminder that personality science still depends on understanding individual differences in how the self holds together under pressure and how it manages conflict and meaning, both when awake and asleep.

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